

That taughte hym, wher that hym myghte availle.
He koude spare of lechours oon or two,
To techen hym to foure and twenty mo.
for thogh this Somnour wood were as an hare,
To telle his harlotrye I wol nat spare;
for we been out of his correccioun;
They han of us no iurisdiccoun,
Ne nevere shullen, terme of alle hir tyves.
Peter! so been the wommen of the styves,
Quod the Somnour, yput out of my cure!
Dees! with myschance and with mysaventure!
Thus seyde our hoost, and lat hym telle his tale.
Now telleth forth, thogh that the Somnour gale,
Ne spareth nat, myn owene maister deere.

THIS false theef, this Somnour, quod the
frere,
Hadde alwey bawdes redy to his hond,
As any hawk to lure in Engeland,
That tolde hym al the secree that they knewe;
for hire acqueyntance was nat come of newe.
They weren his approwours prively;
He took hymself a greet profit therby;
His maister knew nat alwey what he wan.
Withouten mandement, a lewed man
He koude somne, on peyne of Cristes curs,
And they were glade for to fille his purs,
And make hym grete feestes atte nale;
And right as Judas hadde purses smale,
And was a theef, right swich a theef was he;
His maister hadde but half his duece.
He was, if I shal yeven hym his laude,
A theef, and eek a Somnour, and a baude.
He hadde eek wenches at his reteneue,
That whether that sir Robert, or sir Huwe,
Or Jakke, or Rauf, or whoso that it were,
That lay by hem, they tolde it in his ere;
Thus was the wenche and he of oon assent.
And he wolde fecche a feyned mandement,
And somne hem to the chapitre bothe two,
And pile the man, and lete the wenche go.
Channewoldeheseye, freend, I shal for thysake
Do striken hire out of oure lettres blake;
Thee thar namore as in this cas travaille;
I am thy freend, ther I thee may availle.
Certeyn he knew of briberyes mo
Than possible is to telle in yeres two;
for in this world nys dogge for the bowe,
That kan an hurt deer from an hool yknowe,
Bet than this Somnour knew a sly lechour,
Or an avowtier, or a paramour;
And, for that was the fruyt of al his rente,
Therefore on it he sette al his entente.

AND so bifel, that ones on a day
This Somnour, evere waityng on his pray,
Rode for to somne a widwe, an old ribibe,
feynynge a cause, for he wolde brybe.
And happed that he saugh before hym ryde
A gay yeman, under a forest/syde.
A bowe he bar, and arwes brighte and kene;
He hadde upon a courtepy of grene;
An bat upon his heed with frenches blake.
Sire, quod this Somnour, hay! and wel atake!
Welcome! quod he, and every good felawe!

Wher rydestow under this grene/wode shawe?
Seyde this yeman, wiltow fer to day?
This Somnour hym answerde, and seyde, Nay,
heere faste by, quod he, is myn entente
To ryden, for to reysen up a rente
That longeth to my lordes duece.
Artow thanne a baillly? Ye, quod he,
he dorste nat, for verray filthe and shame,
Seyde that he was a Somnour, for the name.

EPHARDIEUX! quod this yeman, deere
brother,
Thou art a baillly, and I am another.
I am unknowen as in this contree;
Of thyn aqueyntance I wolde praye thee,
And eek of bretherhede, if that yow leste.
I have gold and silver in my cheste;
If that thee happe to comen in oure shire,
Hi shal be thyn, right as thou wolt desire.
Grantmercy! quod this Somnour, by my feith!
Everych in ootheres hand his trouthe leith,
for to be sworne bretheren til they deye.
In daliance they ryden forth hir weye.

THIS Somnour, which that was as ful of jangles,
As ful of venym been thise waryangles,
And evere enquiryng upon every thyng;
Brother, quod he, where is now youre dwellyng?
Another day if that I sholde yow seche?
This yeman hym answerde in softe speche:
Brother, quod he, fer in the north contree,
Wher, as I hope, som tyme I shal thee see.
Er we departe, I shal thee so wel wisse,
That of myn hous ne shaltow nevere mysse.

NOW, brother, quod this Somnour, I yow
preye,
Teche me, whil that we ryden by the weye,
Syn that ye been a baillif as am I,
Som subtilite, and tel me feithfully
In myn office how that I may moost wyne,
And spareth nat for conscience ne synne,
But as my brother tel me, how do ye.

Now, by my trouthe, brother deere, seyde he,
As I shal tellen thee a feithful tale,
My wages been ful streite and eek ful smale;
My lord is hard to me and daungerous,
And myn office is ful laborious;
And therefore by extorcions I lyve.
forsothe, I take al that men wol me yeve,
Algate, by sleyghte or by violence,
fro yeer to yeer I wyne al my dispenche;
I kan no bettre telle feithfully.

Now certes, quod this Somnour, so fare I;
I spare nat to taken, God it woot,
But if it be to hevy or to hoot.
What I may gete in conseil prively;
No maner conscience of that have I;
Nere myn extorcoun, I myghte nat tyven,
Nor of swiche japes wol I nat be shryven.
Stomak, ne conscience, ne knowe I noon;
I shrewe thise shrifte/fadres everychoon.
Wel be we met, by God and by Seint Jame!
But, leewe brother, tel me thanne thy name,
Quod this Somnour; and in this meenwhile
This yeman gan a lifel for to smyle.

BROTHER, quod he, wiltow that I thee telle?
I am a feend; my dwellyng is in helle,
And heere I ryde aboute my purchasyng,
To wite wher men wolde yeve me anythyng.
My purchas is the effect of al my rente.
Looke how thou rydest for the same entente,
To wyne good, thou rekkest nevere how;
Right so fare I, for ryde I wolde right now
Unto the worldes ende for a preye.

QUOD this Somnour, benedicite! what
sey ye?
I wende ye were a yeman trewely.
Ye han a mannes shap as wel as I;
han ye a figure thanne determinat
In helle, ther ye been in youre estat?
Nay, certeinly, quod he, ther have we noon;
But whan us liketh, we kan take us oon,
Or elles make yow seme we been shape
Somytym lyk a man, or lyk an ape;
Or lyk an angel kan I ryde or go.
Or lyk a wonder thyng thogh it be so;
It is no wonder thyng thogh it be so;
A lowys jogelour kan deceyve thee,
And pardee! yet kan I moore craft than he.

Why, quod the Somnour, ryde ye thanne or
goon
In sondry shap, and nat alwey in oon?
for we, quod he, wol us swiche formes make
As moost able is oure preyes for to take.
What maketh yow to han al this labour?
ful many a cause, leewe sire Somnour,
seyde this feend, but alle thyng hath tyme;
The day is short, and it is passed pryme,
And yet ne wan I nothyng in this day;

I wol entende to wyne, if I may,
And nat entende our wittes to declare.
for, brother myn, thy wit is al to bare
To understonde, althogh I tolde hem thee.
But, for thou axest why labouren we;
for somtyme we been Goddes instruments
And meenes to doon his comandements,
Whan that hym list, upon his creatures,
In divers art and in diverse figures.
Withouten hym we have no myght, certayn,
If that hym list to stonden ther agayn.
And somtyme, at oure prayere, han we leve
Only the body and nat the soule greve;
Witnessse on Job, whom that we diden wo;
And somtyme, han we myght of bothe two,
This is to seyn, of soule and body eke.
And somtyme be we suffred for to seke
Upon a man, and doon his soule unreste,
And nat his body, and al is for the beste.
Whan he withstandeth oure temptacioun,
It is the cause of his savacioun;
Albeit that it was nat oure entente
he sholde be sauf, but that we wolde hym hente.
And somtyme be we servant unto man,
As to the erchebisshope Seint Dunstan;
And to the Apostles, servant eek was I.
ET tel me, quod the Somnour, feithfully,
Make ye yow newe bodies thus alway
Of elements? The feend answerde, Nay;
Somytyme we feyne, and somtyme we aryse

With dede bodies in ful sondry wyse,
And speke as renably and faire and wel
As to the Phitonissa dide Samuel;
And yet wol som men seye it was nat he.
I do no fors of youre dyvynytee,
But o thyng warne I thee, I wol nat jape,
Thou wolt algates wite how we been shape;
Thou shalt hereafterwardes, my brother deere,
Come there thee nedeth nat of me to leere.
for thou shalt by thyn owene experience
Konne in a chayer rede of this sentence
Bet than Virgile, while he was on lyve,
Or Dant also; now lat us ryde blyve,
for I wole holde compaignye with thee
Til it be so, that thou forsake me.

Why, quod this Somnour, that shal nat
bityde;

I am a yeman, knowen is ful wyde;
My trouthe wol I holde as in this cas.
for though thou were the devel Sathanas,
My trouthe wol I holde to my brother,
As I am sworn, and ech of us til oother
for to be trewe brother in this cas;
And bothe we goon abouten oure purchas.
Taak thou thy part, what that men wol thee yive,
And I shal myn; thus may we bothe lyve,
And if that any of us have moore than oother,
Lat hym be trewe, and parte it with his brother.

GRANTE, quod the devel, by my fey!
And with that word they ryden forth hir wey.
And right at the entryng of the townes ende,
To which this Somnour shoop hym for to
wende,

They saugh a cart, that charged was with hey,
Which that a carter droof forth in his wey.
Deep was the wey, for which the carte stood;
The carter smoot, and cryde, as he were wood,
Hayt, Brok! hayt, Scot! what spare ye for the
stones?

The feend, quod he, yow fecche body and bones,
As ferforthly as evere were ye foled!
So muche wo as I have with yow tholed!
The devel have al, bothe hors and cart and hey!
This Somnour seyde, heere shal we have
a pley;

And neer the feend he drough, as noght ne
were,
ful prively, and rowned in his ere:
Herke, my brother! herke, by thy feith!
herestow nat how that the carter seith?
hent it anon, for he hath yeve it thee,
Bothe hey and cart, and eek his caples thre.
Nay, quod the devel, God woot, never a deel;
It is nat his entente, trust me weel.
Axe hym thyself, if thou nat trowest me,
Or elles stynt awhile, and thou shalt see.
This carter thakketh his hors upon the croupe,
And they bigonne drawen and tostoupe.
Heyt, now! quod he, ther Jhesu Crist yow
blesse!
And al his handwerk, bothe moore and leese!
That was wel twight, myn owene lyard boy!
I pray God save thee! and Seint Loy!